

What is claimed is:

1. A method for directing the operation of a slot machine, the method comprising the steps of:
- identifying at least one tracked symbol;
  - initializing a running count;
  - generating an outcome represented by a plurality of symbols;
  - determining an occurrence of the at least one tracked symbol;
  - adjusting the running count, including increasing the running count to reflect occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol and decreasing the running count to reflect expiration of occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol; and
  - determining a bonus payout based on the running count.
2. The method of claim 1 wherein:
- the step of adjusting includes adding a predetermined integer value to the running count; and
  - the step of adjusting further includes subtracting a predetermined integer value from the running count.
3. The method of claim 1 further including the steps of:
- identifying an expiration condition representing a number of plays after which an occurrence of the at least one tracked symbol expires; and
  - determining an expiration of an occurrence of the at least one tracked symbol based the expiration condition.
4. The method of claim 1 further including the steps of:

identifying an expiration condition representing a time after which an occurrence of the at least one tracked symbol expires; and  
determining an expiration of an occurrence of the at least one tracked symbol based on the expiration condition.

5. The method of claim 1 further including the steps of  
determining a payout based on the outcome;  
determining whether the payout equals zero; and  
wherein the step of determining an occurrence is performed only if the payout equals zero.

6. The method of claim 1 further including the step of storing the running count on a player tracking card, and wherein the running count includes status data representing an expiration condition of each occurrence of the at least one tracked symbol.

7. The method of claim 1 further including the step of storing the running count at a slot server, and wherein the running count includes status data representing an expiration criterion of each occurrence of the at least one tracked symbol.

8. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of determining a bonus further includes determining the bonus based on a number of plays of the slot machine.

9. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of determining a bonus further includes determining the bonus based on a duration of time.

1 10. The method of claim 1 wherein the running count represents occurrences of the at least one  
2 tracked symbol generated by a second slot machine.

1 11. The method of claim 1 further including the step of receiving a wager; and wherein the step  
2 of determining a bonus further includes determining the bonus based on a wager amount.

1 12. The method of claim 1 wherein the at least one tracked symbol includes:  
2 at least one bonus symbol which contributes to the running count;  
3 at least one offsetting symbol; and  
4 the step of adjusting the running count further includes subtracting occurrences of the at least  
5 one offsetting symbol.

1 13. The method of claim 1 further including the step of determining a payout, and the step of  
2 determining a bonus comprises determining a multiplier to be applied to the payout.

1 14. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of determining a bonus payout includes determining  
2 points for a slot play reward system.

1 15. The method of claim 14 further including the step of determining a payout for expired  
2 occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol.

1 16. The method of claim 1 wherein the slot machine comprises a reel slot machine, and the  
2 symbols comprise reel symbols.

1 17. The method of claim 16 wherein:

the reel slot machine includes a symbol display window and a payout line visible within the symbol display window; and

the step of determining an occurrence includes selecting at least one tracked symbol from amongst all symbols displayed in the symbol display window.

18. The method of claim 16 wherein the step of determining an occurrence includes selecting the at least one tracked symbol from amongst symbols on one specified reel of the reel slot machine.

19. The method of claim 1 wherein the slot machine comprises a video poker machine, and the symbols comprise playing card attributes.

20. The method of claim 19 wherein the at least one tracked symbol comprises a function of the face value of cards dealt in a hand.

21. A method for directing the operation of a slot machine, the method comprising the steps of:  
identifying at least one tracked symbol;  
associating a predetermined expiration condition with each occurrence of the at least one tracked symbol after which each occurrence of the at least one tracked symbol is expired;  
generating a running count including adding new occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol and subtracting expired occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol; and  
identifying a bonus payout based on the running count.

22. A method for directing the operation of a slot machine, the method comprising the steps of:  
identifying at least one tracked symbol having associated therewith an expiration condition after which the at least one tracked symbol is expired;

4 generating a running count including adding new occurrences of the at least one tracked  
5 symbol and subtracting expired occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol, thereby determining  
6 an ongoing count of active occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol;  
7 identifying a bonus value; and  
8 generating a bonus payout when the running count exceeds the bonus value.

1 23. A method in accordance with claim 22 wherein the step of generating a running count further  
2 includes the steps of:

3 initializing the running count upon the initiation of a session of play by a player; and  
4 terminating the running count upon the termination of the session of play by the player;  
5 whereby the running count is active throughout the session of play.

1 24. A method for directing the operation of a slot machine, the method comprising the steps of:  
2 initiating a session of play;  
3 identifying at least one tracked symbol;  
4 associating an expiration condition with the at least one tracked symbol after which the at  
5 least one tracked symbol is expired;  
6 identifying a bonus value;  
7 accumulating a count of active occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol during the  
8 session of play; and  
9 awarding a bonus payout when the running count exceeds the bonus value.

1 25. A slot machine for determining a bonus payout, the slot machine comprising:  
2 a processor;

3 a memory connected to the processor storing a program to control the operation of the  
4 processor;  
5 the processor operative with the program in the memory to:  
6 identify at least one tracked symbol;  
7 initialize a running count;  
8 generate an outcome represented by a plurality of symbols;  
9 determine an occurrence of the at least one tracked symbol;  
10 adjust the running count, including increasing the running count to reflect occurrences  
11 of the at least one tracked symbol and decreasing the running count to reflect expiration of  
12 occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol; and  
13 determine a bonus payout based on the running count.

1 26. The slot machine of claim 25 wherein the processor is further operative with the program in  
2 the memory to:

3 identify an expiration condition representing a number of plays after which an occurrence of  
4 the at least one tracked symbol expires; and  
5 determine an expiration of an occurrence of the at least one tracked symbol based the  
6 expiration condition.

1 27. The slot machine of claim 25 wherein the processor is further operative with the program in  
2 the memory to:

3 identify an expiration condition representing a time after which an occurrence of the at least  
4 one tracked symbol expires; and  
5 determine an expiration of an occurrence of the at least one tracked symbol based on the  
6 expiration condition.

1 28. The slot machine of claim 25 wherein the processor is further operative with the program in  
2 the memory to:

3 determine a payout based on the outcome;

4 determine whether the payout equals zero; and

5 wherein an occurrence is determined only if the payout equals zero.

1 29. The slot machine of claim 25 wherein the processor is further operative with the program in  
2 the memory to store the running count on a player tracking card, and wherein the running count  
3 includes status data representing an expiration condition of each occurrence of the at least one  
4 tracked symbol.

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1 30. The slot machine of claim 25 wherein the processor is further operative with the program in  
2 the memory to store the running count at a slot server, and wherein the running count includes status  
3 data representing an expiration criterion of each occurrence of the at least one tracked symbol.

1 31. The slot machine of claim 25 wherein the processor is further operative with the program in  
2 the memory to determine the bonus based on a number of plays of the slot machine.

1 32. The slot machine of claim 25 wherein the processor is further operative with the program in  
2 the memory to determine the bonus based on a duration of time.

1 33. The slot machine of claim 25 wherein the running count represents occurrences of the at least  
2 one tracked symbol generated by a second slot machine.

1 34. The slot machine of claim 25 wherein the processor is further operative with the program in  
2 the memory to receive a wager; and wherein the bonus is determined based on a wager amount.

1 35. The slot machine of claim 25 wherein the processor is further operative with the program in  
2 the memory to:

3 determine a payout, and

4 determine the bonus by determining a multiplier to be applied to the payout.

1 36. The slot machine of claim 25 wherein the processor is further operative with the program in  
2 the memory to determine the bonus payout by determining points for a slot play reward system.

1 37. The slot machine of claim 36 wherein the processor is further operative with the program in  
2 the memory to determine a payout for expired occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol.

1 38. The slot machine of claim 25 wherein the slot machine comprises a video poker machine, and  
2 the symbols comprise playing card attributes.

1 39. A slot machine for determining a bonus payout, the slot machine comprising:

2 a processor;

3 a memory connected to the processor storing a program to control the operation of the  
4 processor;

5 the processor operative with the program in the memory to:

6 identify at least one tracked symbol;

7 associate a predetermined expiration condition with each occurrence of the at least  
8 one tracked symbol after which each occurrence of the at least one tracked symbol is expired;



generate a running count including adding new occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol and subtracting expired occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol; and identify a bonus payout based on the running count.

40. A slot machine for determining a bonus payout, the slot machine comprising:

a processor;

a memory connected to the processor storing a program to control the operation of the processor;

the processor operative with the program in the memory to:

identify at least one tracked symbol having associated therewith an expiration condition after which the at least one tracked symbol is expired;

generate a running count including adding new occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol and subtracting expired occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol, thereby determining an ongoing count of active occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol;

identify a bonus value; and

generate a bonus payout when the running count exceeds the bonus value.

41. A slot machine for determining a bonus payout, the slot machine comprising:

a processor;

a memory connected to the processor storing a program to control the operation of the processor;

the processor operative with the program in the memory to:

initiate a session of play;

identify at least one tracked symbol;

8 associate an expiration condition with the at least one tracked symbol after which the  
9 at least one tracked symbol is expired;  
10 identify a bonus value;  
11 accumulate a count of active occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol during the  
12 session of play; and  
13 award a bonus payout when the running count exceeds the bonus value.

1 42. A slot machine for determining a bonus payout, the slot machine comprising:  
2 means for identifying at least one tracked symbol;  
3 means for initializing a running count;  
4 means for generating an outcome represented by a plurality of symbols;  
5 means for determining an occurrence of the at least one tracked symbol;  
6 means for adjusting the running count, including increasing the running count to reflect  
7 occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol and decreasing the running count to reflect expiration  
8 of occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol; and  
9 means for determining a bonus payout based on the running count.

1 43. A slot machine for determining a bonus payout, the slot machine comprising:  
2 means for identifying at least one tracked symbol;  
3 means for associating a predetermined expiration condition with each occurrence of the at  
4 least one tracked symbol after which each occurrence of the at least one tracked symbol is expired;  
5 means for generating a running count including adding new occurrences of the at least one  
6 tracked symbol and subtracting expired occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol; and  
7 means for identifying a bonus payout based on the running count.

1 44. A slot machine for determining a bonus payout, the slot machine comprising:  
2 means for identifying at least one tracked symbol having associated therewith an expiration  
3 condition after which the at least one tracked symbol is expired;  
4 means for generating a running count including adding new occurrences of the at least one  
5 tracked symbol and subtracting expired occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol, thereby  
6 determining an ongoing count of active occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol;  
7 means for identifying a bonus value; and  
8 means for generating a bonus payout when the running count exceeds the bonus value.

1 45. A slot machine for determining a bonus payout, the slot machine comprising:  
2 means for initiating a session of play;  
3 means for identifying at least one tracked symbol;  
4 means for associating an expiration condition with the at least one tracked symbol after which  
5 the at least one tracked symbol is expired;  
6 means for identifying a bonus value;  
7 means for accumulating a count of active occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol  
8 during the session of play; and  
9 means for awarding a bonus payout when the running count exceeds the bonus value.

1 46. A computer-readable storage medium encoded with processing instructions for implementing  
2 a method for directing a slot machine to determine a bonus payout, said processing instructions for  
3 directing a computer to perform the steps of:  
4 identifying at least one tracked symbol;  
5 initializing a running count;  
6 generating an outcome represented by a plurality of symbols;

7 determining an occurrence of the at least one tracked symbol;  
8 adjusting the running count, including increasing the running count to reflect occurrences of  
9 the at least one tracked symbol and decreasing the running count to reflect expiration of occurrences  
10 of the at least one tracked symbol; and  
11 determining a bonus payout based on the running count.

1 47. A computer-readable storage medium encoded with processing instructions for implementing  
2 a method for directing a slot machine to determine a bonus payout, said processing instructions for  
3 directing a computer to perform the steps of:

4 identifying at least one tracked symbol;  
5 associating a predetermined expiration condition with each occurrence of the at least one  
6 tracked symbol after which each occurrence of the at least one tracked symbol is expired;  
7 generating a running count including adding new occurrences of the at least one tracked  
8 symbol and subtracting expired occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol; and  
9 identifying a bonus payout based on the running count.

1 48. A computer-readable storage medium encoded with processing instructions for implementing  
2 a method for directing a slot machine to determine a bonus payout, said processing instructions for  
3 directing a computer to perform the steps of:

4 identifying at least one tracked symbol having associated therewith an expiration condition  
5 after which the at least one tracked symbol is expired;  
6 generating a running count including adding new occurrences of the at least one tracked  
7 symbol and subtracting expired occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol, thereby determining  
8 an ongoing count of active occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol;  
9 identifying a bonus value; and

generating a bonus payout when the running count exceeds the bonus value.

49. A computer-readable storage medium encoded with processing instructions for implementing a method for directing a slot machine to determine a bonus payout, said processing instructions for directing a computer to perform the steps of:

initiating a session of play;

identifying at least one tracked symbol;

associating an expiration condition with the at least one tracked symbol after which the at least one tracked symbol is expired;

identifying a bonus value;

accumulating a count of active occurrences of the at least one tracked symbol during the session of play; and

awarding a bonus payout when the running count exceeds the bonus value.